Blacklist Interview, June 2, 1992.

1. What was it like to be blacklisted?

It was an "honor" that we (my wife and I) would rather have forgone, had there been an honorable way of doing so. Enduring it was, for those blacklistees who remained in the community, a little like being a POW -- although on a much more benign, much less restrictive scale.

We were isolated, especially in the early years, from most (but not all) of our non-blacklisted friends, many of whom avoided us for fear that they might be tainted by the contact.

The struggle for survival did violence to our professional lives, of course. There were some blacklistees who were hurt more severely than others. For many of the older writers the experience diminished the quality and the duration of their lives.

There were also a few suicides.

2. What, if anything, was the cost to society?

The cost to society is incalculable. It is impossible to estimate the value of work that never came to fruition because of the blacklist. It is also impossible to quantify the broken marriages and the ruptured friendships. These were even more hurtful than the financial and career suffering.

In addition, there was an atmosphere that made even non-blacklisted writers "careful" of what they wrote -- and with whom they consorted.

3. How does the blacklist relate to today?

In certain ways I believe that the blacklist has made people -- at least those who are aware of that grim period -- more sensitive to the dangers that confront society when when the First Amendment is threatened.

There is a poetic beauty in those forty-five (45!) words:

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

1. What was it like to be blacklisted?

It was something like being a POW -- on a much smaller scale, of course -- in that we were, for a time, isolated from our non-blacklisted friends, some of whom avoided us for fear that they would be tainted.

The struggle for survival, of course, had no violence to contend with, although there was violence done to our professional lives, in a figurative sense; and, in a few instances there were blacklist victims who were old enough when the blow hit to be hurt in ways that, I believe, diminished both the length and quality of their lives.

2. The cost to society is incalculable because it's not possilbe to judge the value of works that never came to fruition because of the B-L. And there was a sense of "menace" that made unblacklisted people careful.

3. How does it relate to today? In certain ways it has made people -- those who are aware of -- and of course those directly affected by -- the blacklist -- more sensitive to the possible consequences of events that damage or endanger the 1st amendment. Of course, the number of such people is rapidly diminishing with time. I think most reasonable people now have more awareness of the danger of that kind of "censorship" -- to stretch the word to a catchall of all related incursions by govt. into the rights of the individual.

I see a clear, if not exact, parallel between HUAC and today's censors in that both were/are trying to achieve a conformity with their standards to which everyone ~~should~~ to adhere.

they want

I believe that there is a basic arrogance in the practice of censorship. Underlying it is the contention that the censorable materials, if allowed to circulate, would in some way inflict damage upon society -- but apparently (actual) will not harm the censors who "bravely" expose themselves to it in order to rule it censorable.

The implication is that the censors are "superior people" immune from these artistic poisons that do such terrible things to ordinary human beings. It is a not-too-subtle form of "big brotherism."

Censors are arrogant in the deepest sense of the word; they arrogate to themselves the right to establish standards of what is permissible in art or literature or motion pictures.

although ~~if not~~ exactly the same, HUAC said, in effect, that they are the standard of Americanism; and whatever and whomever they disagree with is un-American!

Both flout

The 1st Amendment which says "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; of abridging freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble."